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ABSTRACT

Professional development is the cornerstone of school transformation. The first part of this two-part paper describes the professional development experiences of several hundred teachers and administrators in schools implementing New American Schools (NAS) designs and discusses the links between these professional development experiences and key elements of district policy. The second part of the paper draws on the lessons from these experiences to provide a step-by-step guide for districts' use in creating a professional development infrastructure to support whole-school transformation. Early findings from the evaluation of implementation of the NAS designs indicate that the designs pose seven challenges to teachers. To be successful in implementing the designs teachers need to learn how to become facilitators; to develop student potential; to allocate resources to support instruction; to straddle the boundaries between school, home, and community; to develop curriculum; to work in teams; and to participate actively in school governance. (Contains 2 references.) (DFR)

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New American Schools

How to Rebuild a Local Professional Development Infrastructure

Part 1: Learning from the Experience of New American Schools
Part 2: Creating a Professional Development Infrastructure to Support Whole-School Transformation

M. Bruce Haslam

Professional development is the cornerstone of school transformation, writes Bruce Haslam. In the first part of this two-part paper, Haslam describes the professional development experiences of several hundred teachers and administrators in schools implementing New American Schools Designs and discusses the links between these professional development experiences and key elements of district policy. In the second part of the paper (page 12), he draws on the lessons from these experiences to provide a step-by-step guide for districts' use in creating a professional development infrastructure to support whole-school transformation.

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New American Schools

New American Schools (NAS) is a dynamic coalition of teachers, administrators, parents, community and business leaders, policy makers, and experts from around the country committed to improving achievement for all students by dramatically changing America's classrooms, schools, and school systems.

Unlike many reforms that are add-on programs or isolated projects, NAS designs aim to improve the whole school, from curricula and instruction to funding and community involvement.

Recognizing that one size doesn't fit all schools and communities, NAS offers a choice of different designs—blueprints—for helping all students achieve at high levels. (For information on each design, turn to the inside back cover.)

New American Schools has clear and consistent goals:

- Establish supportive and assistance-oriented school systems.
- Develop school and teacher capacity to teach all students to high academic standards.
- Spend resources wisely with an eye to student results.
- Build broad and deep community support for education improvement and excellence.
- Make America's public schools places where all students excel.

New American Schools is results-oriented.

In a short period of time, NAS has generated impressive results. In many schools using a NAS design:

- students are producing higher-quality work, achieving at higher levels, and showing improvement on standardized tests and other measures of performance;
- discipline problems are down and student attendance and engagement are up;
- both teacher enthusiasm and community involvement are on the rise; and
- student achievement is improving quicker than conventional wisdom suggests is possible.

New American Schools helps partner districts restructure.

To overcome traditional barriers to school excellence, NAS provides focused assistance to its district partners in five key areas:

- rethinking school finance, including investment funding and resource reallocation strategies;
- revamping professional development infrastructures to support whole-school transformation;
- setting high academic standards and linked assessments;
- giving schools authority to make decisions about curriculum, staff, and spending as well as holding them accountable for results; and
- engaging parents and the public in improvement efforts.

New American Schools believes in shared accountability.

The foundation of NAS is a strong partnership built on shared responsibility for results. Clearly defined roles link partners to one another and to results. All stakeholders in a NAS community—teachers, administrators, district leaders, parents, NAS Design Teams—are expected to take responsibility and to be held accountable for helping to improve student achievement.

NAS partners also commit to regular and rigorous assessment of their performance, resulting in the sound business practice of continuous improvement. The RAND Corporation is the independent evaluator of the New American Schools' effort.

How to Rebuild a Local Professional Development Infrastructure

Part 1: Learning from the Experience of New American Schools

M. Bruce Haslam

There is growing recognition that the professional development of teachers, school administrators, and other school staff is the cornerstone of school reform. At the same time, as Richard Elmore recently pointed out in his study of professional development in New York City's District 2, "Most school systems see professional development as a discrete activity, organized and managed as one specialized function among many, usually from the central office."[1] From this perspective, professional development, like pizza, is something that is ordered from a standard menu and delivered to teachers. Typically, there are few opportunities for follow up, not much time or encouragement for either individual or collective reflection, and little testing of new ideas and information. It is not surprising that investments in these kinds of events do not yield substantial improvements in content or instruction, much less improved student achievement.

The good news is that there are important efforts underway to create learning opportunities that are fully integrated with whole-school reforms. In these cases, it is no exaggeration to say that professional development and school transformation are virtually synonymous. Or, as Elmore describes this relationship in District 2,

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[1] Elmore, R. F., & Burney, D. "Staff Development and Instructional Improvement: Community District 2, New York City." March 1996. (Manuscript in preparation.)

". . . professional development permeates the work of the organization and the organization of the work" (Elmore & Burney 1996, p. 14). School transformation, as envisioned by New American Schools (NAS) and the New American Schools Design Teams, requires teachers and administrators to fundamentally alter their perspectives on teaching and learning and to develop and implement new approaches to almost every facet of education.

". . . it is no exaggeration to say that professional development and school transformation are virtually synonymous."

Seven Challenges to Teachers

Early findings from the evaluation of implementation of the NAS designs indicate that the designs pose seven challenges to teachers. To be successful in implementing the designs teachers need to learn how to:

1. Become facilitators, guides, and explorers;
2. Develop the potential of individual students;
3. Allocate resources to support instruction;
4. Effectively straddle the boundaries between school, home, and community;
5. Develop curriculum and enhance their own subject expertise;
6. Work in teams and network with others; and
7. Participate actively in school governance.

Developing these skills and changing individual and collective behavior requires time for study and reflection on alternatives and opportunities to test, evaluate, modify, and adopt them as part of the routines of the school. Unfortunately, most current approaches to professional development do not provide these opportunities. The professional development and technical assistance envisioned in the New American Schools model, in contrast, does provide many of them.

Once a school has chosen to implement a design, it enters into a long-term relationship with a NAS Design Team. Team members work directly with school staff to help teachers and principals understand and implement the design. In addition, schools that are implementing NAS designs become part of national networks. Participation in these networks enables teachers and principals to learn from the experience of others. As we learned in interviews with dozens of teachers and principals, interactions with colleagues in other schools can also boost flagging spirits at particularly difficult points in the implementation process. An increasingly important dimension of the partnerships among NAS, the Design Teams, and participating jurisdictions is the effort to create opportunities to support high-quality professional development. Often, the changes required in district practice are at least as great as those required in schools.

Changing School District Attitudes

The challenge to school districts is to create a professional development infrastructure that encourages and supports the work of teachers and others as learners and problem solvers. In most districts, this involves significant changes in basic attitudes toward training, in the organization of professional development opportunities, and in the district's role in providing professional development. Thus, district leaders (including the superintendent, central staff, and the school board) need to understand that professional development is a process of adult learning and growth that is most effective in the context of the normal work environment. They must also understand that the content and process of effective professional development are defined by, and embedded in, the reforms that are underway. Districts need to create incentives that encourage active teacher engagement in school transformation and professional development directly tied to

student achievement. They also need to reduce or eliminate disincentives. Finally, district leaders need to recognize their responsibility for setting and maintaining high standards for professional development while also recognizing that school staffs are often in the best position to determine what they need most and where they can find it.

Teachers' and Principals' Perceptions of Design-Based Professional Development

This section provides three kinds of lessons. First, it describes NAS teachers' and principals' perceptions of how and why NAS design-based professional development has contributed to their work. Then it discusses three district-level issues relating to professional development that are critical to the implementation of whole-school designs: one is the evolving role of local staff (school and district) in assisting in implementation efforts; the second is the absence of school-level capacity—or readiness—for change; and the third is the perceived misalignment between district or state policies and key elements of NAS designs. The section concludes with some observations about appropriate school district roles in advancing professional development.

Most teachers and principals in NAS schools take a very pragmatic view of their professional development experiences. They like learning opportunities that focus on improving instructional strategies. Thus, they value most experiences and training that put them in direct contact with the key elements of the designs and with other people working to implement them. Activities that do not have concrete examples and experiences are seen as less helpful. The value that teachers and principals place on networking with colleagues in other schools points to the enormous potential of educators serving as teachers and mentors of other educators.

Teachers and principals are becoming discerning consumers of professional development experiences. A great deal can be learned from their comments on what helps them and why it helps them. Much can also be learned from the comments of teachers and principals experienced in implementing the designs about what does not help.

Seeing Is Believing

Teachers and principals agreed that opportunities to visit other schools and talk with teachers and principals who are implementing the designs are invaluable learning opportunities. Teachers and principals can develop a full understanding of the designs only when they are able to see them firsthand. Visits to other schools allow them to observe classrooms and to talk with experienced teachers. One teacher explained the benefits very simply, "You can give me all the workshops you want, but I want to see things in action. I need a block of time in my own school or to visit other schools. That's the most important part of training." Another teacher said, "The gaps [in the understanding of the design] could have been bridged if all teachers could have seen what an [actual design-based] classroom was supposed to look like. We were told it would be different from our current classrooms, but 'different' is an ambiguous word that does not capture the nuances of the changes required."

"The challenge to school districts is to create a professional development effort that encourages and supports the work of teachers and others as learners and problem-solvers."

Interactions with veteran teachers and visits to schools that are further along in implementation serve several functions. First, they are valuable sources of information and technical assistance to teachers struggling in their classrooms with day-to-day implementation. These veteran teachers can provide useful

explanations of "nuts and bolts" instructional issues (e.g., how to set up classroom learning centers to support design-based instruction, how to assemble a portfolio with first-grade students, or how to find trade books and other resources for students to use in a new expedition, culminating activity, or project).

Second, visits to other schools that have begun the transformation process serve as confidence boosters, particularly when energy and enthusiasm wane. As a principal in an Audrey Cohen school explained, "Seeing the schools in San Diego was very helpful. We sent teachers there and they saw they were on the right path. It was the best thing that could have happened. It helped keep my folks going. We made some changes and saw that we were ahead on some things."

"Second, visits to other schools that have begun the transformation process serve as confidence boosters, particularly when energy and enthusiasm wane."

In the same vein, an ATLAS teacher took comfort in learning that other teachers had found that implementation is hard work and time consuming. This teacher noted, "We were so glad we had the opportunity to go [visit another school]. Previously, I worried how we will ever get this thing right. It calmed me seeing that after five years they were still learning."

Finally, teachers and principals find that participating in national Design Team meetings provided rich opportunities for networking and learning more about the designs and challenges of implementation. One participant said, "We like the idea of networking with other schools around the country to share ideas. Other people are doing similar projects and we learn from them. It's an exciting network and a great resource for us."

An important ingredient in these networking activities is that they are facilitated by the Design Teams. The teams establish the demonstration sites; they put schools in touch with each other; they organize and convene the national meetings; and most of them publish newsletters and disseminate a variety of other materials about the designs and schools' experiences with them. The combination of firsthand observations, personal contacts with colleagues around the country, and frequent written communication forms critical professional ties and is a constant source of encouragement and support.

Teachers and Principals Want Concrete Examples

Teacher and principal engagement with key elements of the designs aids implementation. In addition to talking with other teachers and observing their work, teachers and principals assert that direct experience with the designs is necessary to understand them. Teachers' comments underscore their need for concrete examples: "Teachers who have not yet gotten it do not want theory, they want practical stuff."

As experience with the NAS designs suggests, "practical stuff" is not all that teachers want, but gaining this knowledge can set the stage for other learning. These teachers are quick to point out that engagement with the design elements helps them know what kind of help they need. "As you go, you're more informed and you know what questions to ask. You may want to ask each other and teachers at other schools. Later, you know who is an expert in what."

A number of Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (ELOB) teachers gave high marks to a special ELOB professional development strategy for facilitating teacher engagement with the design—the expedition. ELOB's expeditions allow teachers to experience firsthand how students learn according to the principles of the ELOB design. One teacher described the experience as follows, "On the backpacking trip we lived the design principles;

I could understand what it takes [for a student to learn in an ELOB school]. Once you've had that experience you come away a different person." As this comment suggests, the primary value of the expeditions is that they explicitly model core elements of the design and do so in a way that is effective for adult learners.

Although teachers demand clarity and specificity in the help they receive and design elements they study, this demand should not be interpreted as a request for the kinds of specific prescriptions and formulas that characterize most traditional training and professional development. NAS teachers are quite clear about their willingness to experiment and adapt the designs to their circumstances. These teachers challenge the Design Teams to provide more concrete examples of design elements—including examples from other schools—that they can use and test in their schools and classrooms. Thus, teachers in Modern Red Schoolhouse schools want to see sample Hudson units and capstone examinations; Co-NECT teachers want sample portfolio rubrics; and teachers in Audrey Cohen schools want to see sample constructive actions. Some teachers also say that it is important that the samples of design elements be grade specific. Roots and Wings teachers have high praise for the extensive documentation to support classroom implementation of that model.

Trainers Must Be Credible

Trainers with classroom experience lend credibility to design-based training. Teachers learn much from and trust Design Team staff and consultants with recent classroom experience. Former successful teachers also have credibility. As one elementary teacher explained, "Elementary school teachers want to be trained by trainers who have taught at the same level as us and have similar backgrounds and teaching experience. We need people who have been there and done that."

Trainers with classroom experience also offer practical insights about design elements and implementation. Teachers feel these people can readily help them use design principles to inform day-to-day instructional decisions and to plan and implement new practices. These Design Team staff members and consultants, like veteran teachers in other schools, offer concrete examples that contribute to better understanding of the designs. For example, an ELOB teacher observed that an ELOB trainer with extensive classroom experience "had lots of examples at her fingertips—she could really help us see what the design was about." Similarly, a teacher in a Co-NECT school observed that a consultant with classroom experience "made it all relevant and you could get right into her classroom with her." In the end, what these teacher observations point to is an important standard for high-quality professional development: credible trainers with firsthand experience.

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Time and Timing Are Important

It is no surprise that teachers and principals say they need time to work on implementation and that the timing of the professional development experiences is critical. They need time to learn, to reflect, and to plan. And they want time to plan together. For example, teachers implementing NAS designs agree that the summer institutes, which often represent school staff's first opportunity for intensive study of the designs, should be scheduled early in the summer so that they have ample opportunity to reflect on what they learn and to begin planning

for the new school year. Teachers want "a summer to reflect" on the designs.

In cases where there is not adequate time for reflection, teachers express frustration: "The training was the week before we came back to school. . . . Everything was totally new. . . . We needed more prep time." Another teacher observed that "the time between the training and implementation is not long enough. You have to be ready, and you don't want to waste time. There is not enough prep time for changing your room, ditching your old stuff from last year."

These comments underscore the importance of time for study and reflection. They also reflect teachers' understanding that their work involves both adding new instructional activities to their repertoire and abandoning old ones. These are not easy choices, nor are they choices that can be made quickly.

"Allocating time for professional development means more than just setting aside a few hours or a few days for workshops and other training. . . . It means recognising and acknowledging that reflection, planning, and decision making are part of the regular responsibilities of teachers and other school staff."

Allocating time for professional development means more than just setting aside a few hours or a few days for workshops and other training, although these activities are certainly important. It means recognizing and acknowledging that reflection, planning, and decision making are part of the regular responsibilities of teachers and other school staff. It means recognizing that these activities should be part of the regular school routine, not special events.

Thus, while it may be useful to "capture" a school's annual allotment of professional development days for more formal design-based professional development experiences, it is at least as important to recognize that common planning time, opportunities for working with colleagues, and communication with other schools are basic responsibilities of teachers and principals who are serious about transforming their schools. As one teacher pointed out, planning time is important because "it gives us a chance to work out communication concerns and how to function as a group." She went on to point out that for her and her colleagues, "[planning time] was a critical piece to our development [and] in making the transition to a new curriculum."

Feedback Is Welcome and Essential

Teachers and principals alike value professional development and assistance that include clear feedback on their progress. Roots and Wings' implementation checks and Co-NECT's critical friends visits are two examples of feedback processes that teachers want. The comments of one Roots and Wings teacher echo the thoughts of many teachers who are working on this design, "Implementation checks are very important. I needed someone in my room who could help me see what's wrong and right. Some classrooms really need to be checked up on."

Several teachers in other Roots and Wings schools added that the whole process—preparation, classroom observations, and feedback—helps them and their colleagues reflect on what they are doing. "Before the implementation checks, we write down questions and fax them to the implementation visitors so they are ready to answer them when they come. They are right there to help us." Another reported that "before and after each visit, we all meet and go over our concerns and work with their constructive criticism and use it to better the program." And there is one final benefit: "I got a chance to show off what I'd been doing and got immediate feedback. . . . It was a confidence builder for the people who wrote the program to come in and say you're doing okay. . . . It was nice to have it from the horse's mouth."

The principal strengths of activities such as implementation checks and critical friends' visits are their clarity and specificity. Teachers say that they learn things that are useful in making midcourse corrections and in understanding how well they are doing, both important contributions to implementation. These two review and feedback strategies are integral parts of the portfolios of design-based assistance that the teams provide, and they are critical to the working relationships between the schools and the teams.

Professional Development for Principals Is Important

As is the case in many school districts, the NAS Design Teams currently provide relatively little professional development targeted to principals. Principals do, however, participate in some of the initial professional development with other members of the school staff.

Is the absence of design-based professional development for principals a problem? Few NAS principals think that it is. A few mention specific areas in which they would have liked training, but these principals are clearly exceptions. One reason why principals did not see any gaps in training is suggested by some who have concluded that, because they do not have any direct instructional responsibilities, they require only a general understanding of the design. They believe it is teachers who require more in-depth training.

It is also possible that these comments suggest that principals do not see implementing the designs as whole-school transformation. Therefore, they see little need for major changes in organization and management, for which they might require some help. As the RAND evaluation of the implementation of the NAS designs indicates, staff in many schools treat the designs as one of a number of projects that are under way at the same time. In these schools, the core management task is to juggle the projects—not to alter the culture of the school and the norms, routines, and technologies that are part of it. This is a significant barrier to full implementation.

The Larger Local Context: What Districts Can Do to Support Design-Based Assistance

All jurisdictions that enter into a partnership with NAS sign a memorandum of understanding that calls for the creation of an operating environment that sustains and supports implementation of NAS designs. From the perspective of teachers and principals, what the district does or does not do to support them greatly affects their ability and understanding of the opportunity to change their schools. Three key local issues reflect important lessons about what districts can and should do to create a professional development infrastructure that supports school transformation.

Local Staff Leaders Are Still Learning

In most of the NAS jurisdictions, staff have been given responsibilities as design facilitators. In some cases, district staff have been assigned as district-level design facilitators. In addition, there are school-based design facilitators, usually teachers freed from all or part of their classroom responsibilities, who support their colleagues' implementation of the designs. These two roles—district design facilitator and school design facilitator—are important because they can become part of jurisdictions' capacity to support implementation and scale-up. Facilitators also can become intermediaries between the jurisdictions and the Design Teams. Continued attention to the development of these roles, including substantial investments in training, should be a part of district strategy.

Typically, the district-level design facilitators take on one or more roles. These include:

- Advocate/ombudsman for the design within the district

  In this role, the district design facilitators' primary role is to help schools navigate the district bureaucracy and cut through red tape. One district coordinator offered the following vision of the role, "To really effect change, these schools shouldn't look like other schools. And to do that, you have to free them up from district requirements. It should look different." Another said that "if they [schools implementing the designs] have problems, they contact me. We need to help them solve problems and remove obstacles so they can get to the work at hand."

"One district coordinator offered the following vision of the role, 'To really effect change, these schools shouldn't look like other schools. And to do that, you have to free them up from district requirements. It should look different.'"

- Logistical support for Design Teams

  District design facilitators also provide a variety of logistical support for the Design Teams. This includes, but is certainly not limited to, scheduling meetings and professional development activities. A design facilitator in one district offered some additional examples of how he helps schools, "My schools don't deal with contracts with [the Design Team]. We set up all the workshops and schedule training, send memos, and arrange for credits and stipends. We take the burden off schools so they don't have to do it themselves." These kinds of support are particularly important in large districts and when the Design Teams are working in a number of schools, each with a different schedule and different needs.

- Assistance in school-level implementation

  In this role, district facilitators work with the Design Teams to assist in building-level implementation efforts. This role is not yet well developed.

Thus far, it appears that the district design facilitators have been most successful in the first and second roles and much less successful in the third. Several factors appear to account for these patterns. First, at this stage in the NAS scale-up, design facilitators have limited familiarity with the designs or technical assistance. In many cases their training has been limited to the training that school staffs receive. In addition, most of them do not have experience in technical assistance and professional development. District facilitators in one jurisdiction came from the ranks of district supervisors, a background that did not prepare them for a helping relationship with teachers.

Second, most of the district design facilitators who serve as advocates for the designs and provide logistical support for the Design Teams and the schools devote most of their time to duties as central office administrators. This means that they are well suited to assist schools in solving problems related to district policy and practice. It also means that they do not have time to work with individual schools on implementation tasks. Third—and we speculate here—the first and second roles probably address what the Design Teams viewed as some of the most pressing problems as they began work in unfamiliar districts and were occupied with helping schools begin the implementation process.

Teachers and principals in many NAS schools agree that school-level design facilitators play a key role in design implementation. Frequent, regularly scheduled meetings with school-level design facilitators and other teachers help them solve implementation problems and energize their commitment to the designs. The best meetings provide opportunities to brainstorm, troubleshoot, role-play, swap materials, share strategies, and discuss design philosophy. A teacher in one school described these meetings as follows, "We have a purpose meeting handled by [the school design facilitator]

every other week, through our group planning periods. We get handouts, ask questions, etc. . . . So we are constantly getting some feedback from other teachers and the facilitator. All teachers do this and share ideas." Another teacher in a different school added, "Our facilitator has meetings once a month and we problem-solve for each other. The mimics and role playing really help too—we work it out all together and bounce ideas off each other."

School-level facilitators also work with individual teachers through informal classroom observations and feedback. One result appears to be that these teachers feel less isolated and more motivated to work through implementation problems. As a facilitator in a Co-NECT school explained, "We have to give them a lot of pats on the back and positive reinforcement; [they receive] constant nurturing and feedback." A principal in a Roots and Wings school saw similar benefits of the work of a school-based facilitator, "Teachers go to an in-service and they come back and they are still confused. But [a school facilitator] is someone continuous to help them in their rooms. Teachers can help other teachers, but that is burdensome and [it is] hard to move teachers around to other rooms. . . . Next year we need a full-time . . . facilitator, to order materials and ensure their appropriate use and to help [teachers use] them by modeling and giving assistance."

Clearly, these are challenging roles. As a principal who recognized both the contributions and challenges explained it: "I want [a school facilitator] with training in facilitation, running workshops, and teaching adults. [I want someone] well-spoken, who is motivated and self-directed." To build district capacity to implement and sustain the designs, school-level facilitators, like the district facilitators, require training beyond that typically available to other teachers in their schools.

Teachers' and principals' reflections on the work of the school facilitators, particularly convening and facilitating working sessions among school staff, highlight two additional characteristics of effective professional development. First, these activities appear to work because teachers are engaged collectively and collegially. Not only is this style of engagement likely to increase teacher learning and development, it helps to convey the message that implementing the designs is a whole-school process. Second, these activities help to define design implementation as an ongoing process of problem identification and problem solving.

> *"Frequent, regularly scheduled meetings with school-level design facilitators and other teachers . . . energize their commitment to the designs. The best meetings provide opportunities to brainstorm, troubleshoot, role-play, swap materials, share strategies, and discuss design philosophy."*

Getting Ready to Transform a School Is Not Doing It

The Design Teams provide visions of high performance schools. Design-based assistance is about bringing the vision to reality. For the Design Teams, the starting point in this process is the school's choice, made by consensus, to implement a design. This, in turn, assumes that school staffs have indeed come together and considered their mission and goals and see the NAS designs as the embodiment of what they seek for their school.

In reality, school staffs do not always make careful choices. District staff can play an important role in ensuring that schools have access to good information about the nature of each design. They also can provide opportunities for schools considering a design to visit other schools that have implemented it.

In addition, schools rarely fully understand the meaning of whole-school change, or have all of the skills to move forward by themselves. Thus, what the Design Teams encounter is schools that are not "ready" for change. Norms

of collegiality and continuous progress do not exist, and staff have limited familiarity with innovations in instruction, assessment, and curriculum (e.g., project-based instruction, performance-based assessments, cooperative learning). These schools require district help in getting ready for change. Indeed, schools that are ready to change are in a much better position to choose a design than those that are not. The Design Teams frequently note that when school staffs have basic change skills and a strong predisposition to work together, implementation of the designs proceeds more quickly and more effectively. Thus, an important part of a district's professional development infrastructure is mechanisms to help schools make good choices about designs and prepare for their implementation.

Perceived Misalignment of Design Elements with Policy

A final issue is the perceived misalignment of design elements and state and local policies. Teachers and principals in NAS schools frequently mention what they see as a lack of a clear fit between key elements of the designs and state and local policies. They see the most serious problems in the areas of curriculum and assessment: "Accountability is a real concern. If a school comes to focus exclusively on an ATLAS-type program, teachers are concerned about whether they will receive some kind of a waiver from [the state assessment system requirements]. . . . And the Board will not decide about a waiver; they waffle while our principal tells us get used to [the state assessment] because it's not leaving. . . ."

"These schools require district help in getting ready for change. Indeed, schools that are ready to change are in a much better position to choose a design than those that are not."

Another participant said: "[The required competency-based curriculum has] so many objectives. But a true Co-NECT school needs to be freed up from these objectives. So there are two big things to juggle, and the [district curriculum was] there first."

These observations about misalignment between design elements and state and local policies in assessment are generally consistent with findings in an earlier report from the RAND evaluation team on principals' perspectives about the impact of accountability systems on school reform.[2] Their study concluded, in part, that "[principals] assert that the tensions faced in simultaneously reforming and conforming to accountability systems are thick and palpable" (Mitchell 1996, p. 45).

There are two points to be made here that are important for professional development. First, what is at issue is perceptions of problems in alignment and who holds them. These perceptions are most strongly held by teachers, although they are shared by many principals. At the same time, other principals, district staff, and central office administrators—individuals who do not have direct instructional responsibilities and who may be less involved in day-to-day implementation of the designs—see fewer alignment problems. As one district administrator explained: "The designs have been able to work with and correlate with the [curriculum]. If we were a district where there was no mesh [between the two] it would be much harder." This administrator went on to say that when schools have difficulty implementing the design and teaching to the district curriculum, he makes it clear to the schools that "the [district curriculum] is the curriculum. That's a given." These perceptions are strongly held and greatly influence individual judgments about opportunities and options for school reform.

The fact that central office staff do not always see or acknowledge the misalignment may lead them to hold expectations for progress and results that teachers and principals consider to be unreasonable and unfair.

[2] Mitchell, K. J. *Reforming and Conforming: NASDC Principals Discuss School Accountability Systems.* Santa Monica, CA: RAND, Institute on Education and Training. 1996.

The second point, which follows from the first, is that the perceived misalignment is almost certainly a disincentive to sustained engagement in implementation efforts and related professional development. For example, a number of teachers see implementing a design as a good idea until the time comes to "get serious about basic skills" or a mandatory standardized test. At that point they see a need to refocus their energy and attention on what matters most for them and their students. Given their perceptions, these look like reasonable choices.

Lessons for School Districts from NAS Experience

In many districts, professional development is centralized in two ways. First, districts control professional development resources; decisions about allocating these resources are generally made in the central office. Second, districts act as providers of professional development. Districts typically employ a number of staff who are responsible for providing professional development and technical assistance or who are responsible for hiring external contractors who serve the centralized systems.

The lessons discussed here point to the importance of eight attributes of a high-quality professional development infrastructure which are further discussed in Part 2 of this paper. They include the following:

1. The local education community recognizes and agrees that professional development is the cornerstone of school reform and that it should be a routine part of the work of teachers and administrators.
2. All instructional staff have the basic knowledge and skills necessary to help all students achieve high and challenging academic standards.
3. District policy assigns school staffs responsibility for planning, paying for, and (as appropriate) conducting professional development in support of school transformation.
4. School staffs have sufficient experience and training to make informed decisions about engaging in school transformation— including the choice of a design— and embark on the change process.
5. District-level program administrators and staff are able and available to assist school transformation efforts.
6. The district incentive system encourages and supports individual and collaborative work on whole-school transformation and participation in related professional development activities.
7. There is continuous evaluation of professional development and technical assistance, and evaluation results are regularly used for review, planning, and feedback to schools and providers, including both internal and external providers.
8. School staffs have access to extensive information systems on district policy and programs, student results, and descriptions and documentation of successful reform strategies and models of high-performance schools.

> *"One district administrator explained: 'The designs have been able to work with and correlate with the [curriculum]. If we were a district where there was no mesh [between the two] it would be much harder.'"*

In short, school districts should understand and acknowledge that teacher and principal learning is a critical element in school reform. Districts should also understand that their role is to create and sustain a working environment that encourages and supports this learning. Part 2 of this document, "Creating a Professional Development Infrastructure to Support Whole-School Transformation," provides a preliminary road map to create that environment.

Part 2: Creating a Professional Development Infrastructure to Support Whole-School Transformation

This guide provides a strategy for school districts to use in analyzing current professional development programs and policies in order to restructure and improve them. The goal is to create an infrastructure that supports professional development and increases educators' abilities to work individually and collectively to improve student learning.

The guide sets out a full agenda for study, reflection, planning, and decision making. It calls on districts to establish and support a professional development task force charged with the responsibility of carrying out the review, reporting the results, and making recommendations. It outlines a process for conducting the review. It presents a set of eight attributes and indicators of a local professional development infrastructure to guide planning.

"Professional development consists of all planned learning experiences that focus on improving the quality of instruction. . . . It includes individual and collaborative study, experimentation, and reflection, often guided and facilitated by external providers or colleagues who serve as mentors or teachers."

The guide also presents a set of standards and indicators of high-quality professional development and calls on districts to consider adapting these standards as their own. Finally, it frames specific issues for districts to review as they establish partnerships with NAS Design Teams and similar external providers of design-based assistance.

The guide is based on a broad definition of professional development. Put simply, professional development consists of all planned learning experiences that focus on improving the quality of instruction. Professional development includes traditional activities such as workshops and institutes. It also includes college- or university-based training. Most importantly, professional development also includes individual and collaborative study, experimentation, and reflection, often guided and facilitated by external providers or colleagues who serve as mentors or teachers.

A Six-Step Strategy for Districts

The challenge of supporting and sustaining school transformation involves aligning core elements of district policy with a priority on professional development. Thus, this guide calls on districts to review policies and practices related to their professional development infrastructure and embark on a comprehensive six-step strategy to improve alignment.

Step 1. Convene a professional development task force.

Step 2. Map the local professional development infrastructure.

Step 3. Agree on broad principles and attributes to guide local practice.

Step 4. Report on current professional development programs and policies.

Step 5. Align current professional development programs and policies with the eight attributes of a professional development infrastructure organized to support school transformation.

Step 6. Monitor progress continuously.

Step 1
Convene a professional development task force

Districts interested in rebuilding their professional development infrastructure should convene a task force. The task force should be broadly representative of local constituencies of professional development and school reform. In general, the task force should include the following:

- District administrators responsible for professional development, accountability, and finance;
- Representatives of major programs and initiatives (e.g., Title I, Eisenhower Professional Development, Urban Systemic Initiatives);
- Representatives of professional organizations;
- Representatives of the school board; and
- Community representatives.

The professional development task force should be given a specific charge, including a clear statement about who the audience for the report will be. There should also be agreement on an overall timeline for completing the work and reporting the results. Districts should anticipate that the review process and preparation of reports will require between nine and twelve months.

To facilitate the work of the task force, all administrators and managers of the district's main operating units and program initiatives should be fully apprised of the work of the task force and encouraged to provide whatever assistance the task force requires to carry out its work. It will be particularly important for the task force to have easy access to information about professional development policies, programs, and costs. Districts should also provide staff and financial support for the task force, as necessary.

In general, the task force's charge should be broad and inclusive. Its mandate should include authority to review personnel recruitment and selection; district investments in staff training and development (including orientation activities, in-service programs, release time, sabbatical leave, and district practice governing tuition reimbursement and salary adjustments related to credit accumulation); evaluation of professional development activities; accountability and incentive systems, including assessment of teacher and school performance; and training needs related to site-based budgeting and management. Since the purpose of the activity is to help transform schools, the scope of the task force's mandate should be broad enough to reflect that goal.

Step 2
Map the local professional development infrastructure

The professional development task force should begin by mapping the district's professional development infrastructure to create a database for subsequent review and planning. The map should include two kinds of detailed profiles of the current professional development infrastructure. Data for the profiles should come from documents such as policy manuals, planning guidance, proposals for special projects and other activities, evaluation reports, samples of professional development curricula and related materials, and district and program budgets.

In addition, the task force should consider meeting with key individuals who are familiar with professional development programs and policies. The task force should also consider convening focus groups of teachers and principals to discuss their experiences and perspectives on professional development and to make suggestions for improvements.

"The task force should also consider convening focus groups of teachers and principals to discuss their experiences and perspectives on professional development and to make suggestions for improvements."

Profiling Professional Development and Answering Key Questions

The task force should compile profiles of ongoing professional development activities included as routine district operations, as well as professional development supported under special programs and initiatives (e.g., Title I, Eisenhower Professional Development, Urban Systemic Initiatives). The profiles should address the following questions and others that the task force may identify:

— How much money is spent on the activity or the professional development component of a program (e.g., Title I)? Estimates of costs should include money spent for the delivery of professional development and to support participation (e.g., release time, travel). It is important to note that some costs, particularly those for release time, substitutes, travel, and some stipends may come from sources other than the primary sponsor of the program or activity. These should be included in the cost estimates. The task force may also decide to examine the cost of salary increments and other incentives for participation.

"The task force may also decide to examine the cost of salary increments and other incentives for participation."

— Are there options for reallocating any of the resources spent on this professional development activity?

— Who is involved in decisions about the participants, purpose, content, format, and schedule of the professional development activity?

— How is professional development organized? What is the content? What is the format (e.g., teaching/learning style, intensity, duration, amount of follow up)? Are there sequences to the content? What is the purpose (e.g., to transmit information, to introduce new policies or programs, to develop new skills)?

— How closely are the purpose and content of the activity aligned with district standards and reform priorities?

— Who provides professional development (e.g., central office staff, school staff, consultants)? Are there provisions for reviewing providers' qualifications and providing feedback on the quality of the professional development?

— Who is served (e.g., teachers, administrators, other school and/or district staff)? In general, do teachers, administrators, and other staff participate individually or as working teams?

— Are there procedures to ensure that staff who have the greatest need for professional development and/or who are most likely to benefit from it are able to participate?

— Has the professional development activity been evaluated? If so, what do the evaluation results suggest about the overall quality and impact of the professional development on participants' knowledge and skills, their job performance, and student learning?

The task force should then create a second group of profiles of district policies related to professional development:

- recruitment and selection of new teachers and administrators;
- induction and support of new and/or inexperienced teachers and school administrators;
- promotion and tenure of teachers and school administrators; and
- requirements for school improvement planning, implementation, and monitoring.

These profiles should address the following questions and others the task force may identify:

— How well is the policy aligned with district standards and reform priorities?

— Does the policy explicitly encourage and support participation in professional development activities related to achieving district standards and carrying out reform priorities?

— Has the policy been communicated clearly to district and school staff?

— Has the district provided sufficient resources to support implementation of

and/or compliance with the policies? What additional investments are required of teachers and principals (e.g., expenditures for tuition and participation in various training activities)? Do they make these investments? Here, the task force should consider looking at the investment that teachers and principals are required to make in their own professional development to complete the picture of the total investment in the district. This analysis could also include estimates of the cost to the district of increased compensation associated with advanced training and/or completion of an advanced degree or certification requirements.

Step 3
Agree on broad principles to guide local practice

Having access to data about district professional development policies and programs is important, but it does little, by itself, to transform practice. Step 3 is the crucial stage, because it requires district personnel to agree both on what they want to accomplish and how they will know they have done so. Here districts need to agree on the broad principles and attributes that should be embedded in the local professional development infrastructure, and they need to agree also on standards and indicators of high-quality professional development. Literature reviews and interviews in the NAS districts consistently pointed to eight principles or attributes essential to effective local professional development (see box on page 16).

District leaders interested in redesigning a local professional development infrastructure to support school reform should consider modifying and adopting these principles as their own. The next step in the process outlines how to harness them to performance standards and indicators of quality to advance school transformation.

Step 4
Report on current professional development programs and policies

Once the profiles have been completed, the task force should prepare a report on its findings and observations. This report should address but not necessarily be limited to the following topics and issues:

- The amount of the district's annual investment in professional development and the number of programs and operating units that sponsor professional development;
- The governance of professional development (e.g., who controls professional development resources; who makes decisions about participation, content, format; who has responsibility for quality control);
- Overall alignment of professional development programs and policies with district priorities;
- The contributions of professional development to improved classroom instruction and other changes in practice; and
- The extent to which professional development:

— focuses on improving instruction versus some other focus,

— is organized at the school level versus the district or program level (e.g., Title I, Urban Systemic Initiative),

— is continuous and includes adequate follow-up, and

— focuses on groups of teachers and other staff versus individuals.

Step 5
Align current professional development programs and policies with the eight attributes of a professional development infrastructure organized to support school transformation

Using the map developed in Step 2, the task force should review each of the eight attributes and identify strategic goals and specific action steps

necessary for rebuilding the local professional development infrastructure. For each of the attributes (see box below), the task force should address six questions:

1. Based on the work that has already been done in the district, should addressing the particular attribute and the related indicators be an immediate priority or one that can be addressed in the future?
2. Is there a need to modify any of the indicators to align them with the district context, or are they appropriate as presented?
3. What issues does the district need to address in this area?

EIGHT ATTRIBUTES OF A LOCAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

1. The local education community recognizes and agrees that professional development is the cornerstone of school reform and that it should be a routine part of the work of teachers and administrators.
2. All instructional staff have the basic knowledge and skills necessary to help all students achieve high and challenging academic standards.
3. District policy assigns to school staffs responsibility for planning, paying for, and (as appropriate) conducting professional development in support of school transformation.
4. School staffs have sufficient experience and training to make informed decisions about engaging in school transformation—including the choice of a design—and embark on the change process.
5. District-level program administrators and staff are able and available to assist school transformation efforts.
6. The district incentive system encourages and supports individual and collaborative work on whole-school transformation and participation in related professional development activities.
7. There is continuous evaluation of professional development and technical assistance, and evaluation results are regularly used for review, planning, and feedback to schools and providers, including both internal and external providers.
8. School staffs have access to extensive information systems on district policy and programs, student results, and descriptions and documentation of successful reform strategies and models of high-performance schools.

4. What steps should the district take to address these issues?
5. What resources are necessary to take these steps?
6. What options exist for reallocating current resources to meet new resource needs or for using current resources to leverage changes in professional development programs and participation in these programs?

The responses to these questions will form the basis for the task force's recommendations for rebuilding the local professional development infrastructure.

In the pages that follow, each of the eight attributes is taken up in turn. For each of them, the paper outlines and discusses indicators of progress to help district officials understand what is involved in turning these broad statements of district hopes into operating school realities. Performance standards can also be applied to these attributes. Exhibit 1 also outlines an example of how standards and indicators together can be employed to advance high-quality professional development (page 18).

Attribute 1

The local education community recognizes and agrees that professional development is the cornerstone of school reform and that it should be a routine part of the work of teachers and administrators.

Indicators

- District policy includes clear standards for high-quality professional development, and the standards guide district and school-level decisions about professional development.
- District leadership aggressively communicates the importance of professional development to the local education community.
- Formal job descriptions for school staff and collective bargaining agreements affirm the importance of professional development and include it among routine job responsibilities.
- District policies include annual allocations of time for individual and whole-school professional development.

A critical dimension of district leadership in creating a professional development infrastructure is to communicate the importance of professional development as part of the regular work of school staffs. Setting standards for high-quality professional development, articulating clear and consistent policies, and allocating time for professional development are all things that district leaders can do to communicate the importance of professional development. Districts should consider the "Standards for High-Quality Professional Development," which are displayed in Exhibit 1 (see pages 18 and 19) as a starting point for setting their own local standards.

Districts should also look carefully at mission statements and all areas of district policy that pertain to personnel, incentives, school improvement, and training and professional development. These reviews should examine the districts' messages about professional development and ensure that they consistently stress the importance of professional development for maintaining high-quality programs that result in success for all students.

Attribute 2

All instructional staff have the basic knowledge and skills necessary to help all students achieve to high and challenging academic standards.

Indicators

- Recruitment and hiring policies require that all new teachers have strong academic training and professional preparation.
- Regular teacher performance reviews and decisions about promotions and tenure are based at least in part on evidence of

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demonstrated intellectual competence in core academic disciplines and mastery of standards-based instructional skills.

- Feedback from performance reviews is used as the basis for developing and monitoring individual professional development plans.
- Training in core academic disciplines and training and technical assistance in standards-based instruction are readily available to teachers and other instructional staff who are found to be deficient in these areas.

Creating and maintaining high-performance schools depend in large measure on teachers and other members of the instructional staff having solid academic and professional skills. This might be called the education professional "basic skills" attribute. When these skills are missing, it is unlikely that these individuals will be successful in the classroom or that they will be able to assume meaningful roles in or benefit from school improvement efforts.

"Creating and maintaining high-performance schools depends in large measure on teachers and other members of the instructional staff having solid academic and professional skills. This might be called the education professional 'basic skills' attribute."

District responsibilities here include ensuring that new teachers are fully qualified to enter the classroom and working with experienced teachers to be sure that they, too, possess these basic professional skills. Once teachers have been hired, districts can create a variety of support systems, such as teacher mentors, to facilitate effective induction and retention of new teachers. In addition, districts can set standards for teacher performance and establish procedures for ensuring that teachers and other instructional staff meet these standards. This can include providing training and

EXHIBIT 1

STANDARD

I. Professional development engages teachers, principals, and other school staff, both individually and collectively, as active learners.

II. Professional development engages successful teachers, principals, district staff, and external providers as teachers and mentors of other professionals.

III. Professional development includes opportunities for sustained and, as appropriate, facilitated interactions with staff in other schools within the district and in other districts.

IV. The content of professional development is explicitly linked to challenging state and/or local content and performance standards for students.

V. The content of professional development focuses on core elements of whole-school designs and new dimensions of staff roles

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STANDARDS FOR HIGH-QUALITY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO SUPPORT SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION

INDICATORS

1. Professional development routinely includes opportunities for study and reflection on information and examples from research, successful practice, and their own experience to define and solve problems and to reconstruct new instructional strategies, curricula, assessments, and approaches to organizing and managing their school.
2. Regular school schedules allocate sufficient time for a significant amount of these activities.
3. Professional development and technical assistance for teachers routinely includes opportunities for extensive guided practice of new classroom strategies.
4. Professional development and technical assistance for building administrators routinely includes guided practice of new administration and/or management strategies (e.g., resource reallocation, scheduling).

1. The district, in partnership with external providers (e.g., NAS Design Teams), invests in building the capacity of successful teachers, principals, and district staff to serve as teachers and mentors of other professionals, including the capacity to organize and maintain schools and classrooms as demonstration sites.
2. District and school personnel policies and professional development programs recognize these roles and, as appropriate, incorporate them as regular components of staff assignments.
3. Successful teachers and principals, district staff, and/or external providers regularly observe and provide feedback to principals and teachers who are experimenting with new classroom and/or management strategies.
4. Regular school schedules allocate sufficient time for these activities.

1. District professional development staff, school staff, and external providers work together to create and maintain professional networks.
2. Schools and, as appropriate and necessary, the district allocate sufficient resources (e.g., hardware, software, travel, postage) to ensure full utilization of the networks.
3. Networking activities are facilitated by individuals responsible for (1) informing members about resources available to them through the network; (2) monitoring the quality of information available through the network; and (3) stimulating conversations among the members.

1. Procedures to review the alignment of professional development content with state and/or local standards are in place, and professional development providers are accountable for demonstrating the alignment.

1. Professional development concentrates on theories and practice of instruction and assessment as they are articulated in whole-school designs.
2. Professional development includes preparation in skills required for new teacher roles articulated by whole-school designs (e.g., teacher-as-counselor, instruction and assessment of students with special needs).

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other support to principals and supervisory staff to ensure that they can identify and diagnose gaps in these skills.

Districts can also require that teachers have individual professional development plans that include steps for developing and/or improving basic professional skills and specific learning and performance goals for which teachers will be held accountable. Finally, districts can form close working partnerships with local colleges and universities that prepare teachers to ensure that appropriate training and other support are readily available in both preservice and graduate programs.

"Districts need to create investment funds that can 'jump start' the transformation process . . . and convey the message that incremental, piecemeal change is no longer the order of the day."

Attribute 3

District policy assigns to school staffs responsibility for planning, paying for, and (as appropriate) conducting professional development in support of school transformation.

Indicators

- School improvement plans are required to include plans for professional development that are linked to a clear and coherent vision, improvement goals, and benchmarks for achieving these goals.
- The district (1) provides clear and timely planning guidance to schools; (2) reviews school plans; (3) provides timely feedback and technical assistance in implementing the plans; and (4) monitors progress in implementing the plans, possibly in collaboration with external providers.
- District policy allocates resources to initial investments in implementing whole-school designs and supports long-term agreements with external providers.
- Schools have authority to purchase professional development and technical assistance services and other resources, including materials and equipment, release time, and staff travel for participation in local, regional, or national networks, that are necessary under their approved improvement plans.
- Schools have authority to make staff assignments and to structure schedules to accommodate staff participation in professional development, technical assistance, and related activities that are included in their approved improvement plans.

This attribute defines core dimensions of the working relationship between districts and schools in a decentralized system. The district exerts leadership by setting standards, providing clear guidance and timely feedback, and holding schools accountable for doing what they set out to do.

In districts that have formed long-term partnerships with external providers, such as NAS Design Teams, these external providers help in articulating visions of high-performance schools. They can also help schools and districts set benchmarks and monitor progress in achieving them. In these districts, investment and procurement issues summarized in the third indicator are particularly important. Districts need to create investment funds that can cover the initial costs of design-based assistance to "jump start" the transformation process and, perhaps more importantly, to convey the message that incremental, piecemeal change is no longer the order of the day.

Attribute 4

School staffs have sufficient experience and training to make informed decisions about engaging in school transformation — including the choice of a design — and embark on the change process.

Indicators

- Training, technical assistance, and other follow-up support are available to develop staff capacity for collaborative study, planning, decision making, and resource reallocation.
- Training, technical assistance, and other follow-up support are available to principals and site-based leaders (e.g., instructional leaders, site-based facilitators) to develop their skills in leadership, facilitating individual and collaborative work, knowledge and other resource utilization, and budgeting.

For most school staffs, assuming the responsibilities for school transformation and professional development that are part of a decentralized system will require a considerable amount of training and assistance. If Attribute 2 addresses basic education professional skills, this attribute addresses basic school transformation skills—the skills that are necessary to carry out whole-school change and to take full advantage of long-term partnerships with NAS Design Teams or similar external providers of professional development. School staffs need to be able to work together on sustained tasks. They need to know how to use and interpret a variety of data. Similarly, building-level leaders, including administrators and instructional leaders, need to be able to manage and facilitate individual and collective activities and to garner and effectively utilize knowledge and other resources.

In NAS districts, Design Teams help by training school-level design facilitators to assist in design-based change efforts. NAS may also assist by providing training and technical assistance in resource reallocation and other skills necessary for school transformation.

Districts can also allocate resources for developing and implementing a school transformation "readiness curriculum" as part of its professional development portfolio. This curriculum would incorporate training and experience in the skills discussed here and would be available to school staffs as they look ahead to improving their schools. Significant investments in all these areas may be necessary to ensure that school staffs are ready to engage in the difficult tasks of transforming their schools.

Attribute 5
District-level program administrators and staff are able and available to assist school transformation efforts.

Indicators

- Administrators and managers of principal operating units (e.g., curriculum, finance/budget, personnel) and programs (e.g., Title I, Urban Systemic Initiatives) are fully apprised of school transformation efforts and design requirements and are actively involved in identifying options and opportunities for making their programmatic resources, especially those for professional development, available to support school transformation efforts.

"If Attribute 2 addresses basic education professional skills, [Attribute 4] addresses basic school transformation skills—the skills that are necessary to carry out whole-school change and to take full advantage of long-term partnerships with NAS Design Teams or similar external providers of professional development.

- The district invests in the preparation of district-level staff responsible for professional development and/or technical assistance to assist in school transformation efforts.
- District-level staff responsible for professional development and technical assistance are formally assigned to work with external providers to assist in school transformation efforts.

This attribute addresses the challenge of focusing the core functions and resources of major initiatives on the task of school transformation. As the indicators suggest, part of the challenge is to help program administrators and staff understand what is needed and what they can contribute.

NAS Design Teams can play a major role in providing information about design specifications and training requirements. They can also train district-level staff to assist in design-based assistance, thereby developing an important dimension of district capacity while facilitating school transformation efforts. Training district staff to assist in design-based assistance often requires visits to school sites where designs are fully implemented, seminars with Design Teams, and ongoing participation in design-based assistance activities. This training can require a significant investment in time and money.

"Incentive systems communicate messages about what is valued. Currently incentive systems reward individual teachers for time spent in training events or courses and do not require demonstrated mastery of content or the ability to use new skills in classrooms or elsewhere."

Attribute 6

The district incentive system encourages and supports individual and collaborative work on whole-school transformation and participation in related professional development activities.

Indicators

- Teachers, principals, and other members of school staffs receive "credit" toward promotion and salary increments for participation in school improvement and related professional development activities.
- Criteria by which school and/or teacher performance is assessed (e.g., student achievement of high academic standards) are aligned with core elements of whole-school designs, including NAS and other designs, and alignments are clearly articulated.
- In the absence of alignment between standards and performance criteria and core elements of designs, waivers of existing criteria are possible.

Incentive systems communicate messages about what is valued. Currently, most professional development incentive systems reward individual teachers for time spent in training events or courses and do not require demonstrated mastery of content or the ability to use new skills in classrooms or elsewhere.

Early experience in some NAS jurisdictions also indicates that when design elements are not aligned with local standards and assessments, or when teachers and other school staff think that they are not aligned, there are potentially strong disincentives for teachers to remain committed to implementation and to the professional development that supports it. Districts can remedy these problems by rewarding participation in professional development activities that are directly related to whole-school transformation. Thus, a district could provide professional development "credits" to a school staff that works together to fully implement a NAS or other whole-school design.

As the indicators listed here suggest, it is important for districts, Design Teams, and other external providers to work together to align local standards for teacher and/or school performance and the process for assessing the performance with core elements of the designs. It is also important to recognize that waivers are useful as short-term strategies to support early implementation, but that they are weak long-term strategies.

Overall, the task of aligning design elements and district standards, along with setting benchmarks for monitoring implementation and training district staff to assist in

implementation, is a key element of district-level design-based assistance.

Attribute 7

There is continuous evaluation of professional development and technical assistance, and evaluation results are used for review, planning, and feedback to schools and providers, including both internal and external providers

Indicators

- Short-term evaluations focus on the appropriateness and quality of the content and format of professional development and their contributions to implementation efforts.
- Long-term evaluations focus on the impact of professional development on teacher performance, the organization and structure of the school, and most important, improvements in student learning.
- There are mechanisms for regular review of evaluation results at both the school and district levels and for feedback and discussion with providers.

In most districts, there is little or no evaluation of professional development. Consequently, there is little attention to quality control, limited understanding of effectiveness and impact, and few opportunities for thoughtful improvements. As the indicators suggest, evaluation should start with reviews of the quality and appropriateness of professional development content and format. Are these activities well designed and well implemented? Subsequent evaluations should examine whether or not participation in these activities results in teachers and other staff mastering new content and implementing new practices. Finally, districts and schools should develop regular procedures for publishing and reviewing the results of these evaluations and using them in planning future professional development.

Current evaluation practice does not provide good models for examining the impact of professional development on student learning. Nevertheless, this must be a bottom-line concern in judging the effectiveness of professional development. One approach would be to look at a school-level portfolio of professional development to learn more about how all of the activities in which the faculty participates appear to have contributed to significant changes in instruction—changes that re-define students' opportunities to learn. Over the long term, do these opportunities lead to increased learning for all students?

Attribute 8

School staffs have access to extensive information systems on district policy and programs, student results, and descriptions and documentation of successful reform strategies and models of high-performance schools.

Indicators

- The district and, as appropriate, external providers collaborate to design and maintain high-quality information systems.
- Schools and, as appropriate, the district allocate resources (e.g., hardware, software) to ensure full access to and utilization of databases.

Well-organized, easily accessible information systems are valuable tools in planning, implementation, and monitoring progress. Yet most school staffs have limited access to a broad range of information. Districts and Design Teams can work together to begin organizing these information systems. For example, Design Teams can work with staff in local professional development centers to format and catalog information about design specifications and examples of what various elements of the designs look like when they are implemented. Once these systems are in place, it is relatively easy to add to them as more and more

examples become available. School staffs may require training and technical assistance to develop skills necessary to take full advantage of these databases. In addition, school schedules should allocate time for these activities.

Step 6
Monitor progress continuously

This step simply restates the thrust of Attributes 7 and 8 above, but it is critical to outline it as a separate step to emphasize the need for continuous monitoring of quality and progress. Rebuilding the local professional development infrastructure so that it is both defined by, and embedded in, the reforms themselves is not a one-stage process. It is an ongoing activity. It's not a destination but a continuous process of individual and collective growth and renewal.

Step 6 requires district leaders to acknowledge that reality and provides a mechanism to continuously learn and improve.

Toward a Future of Transformed Schools

The six steps outlined in Part 2 of this document urges districts to convene a task force that will consciously plan for the rebuilding of professional development, map local activities, agree on what the district wants to accomplish and on standards and indicators of performance, report on current professional development programs, reshape current efforts to conform to the new district vision, and continuously monitor progress.

These six steps alone will not transform schools. But without them, there is little hope for dramatic change in teaching and curriculum. If one lesson stands out from Part 1 of this paper, it is that training and professional development must be embedded in the very fabric of district organization. Indeed, it should help organize the very nature of school work itself. This six-step guide outlines a way to act on that lesson. ◆

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New American Schools Designs

As of Fall 1997, New American Schools (NAS) is at work in over 700 schools around the country. NAS district partners commit to transforming a minimum of 30 percent of their schools within five years. Most partners are on track to meet and exceed this goal by year three. NAS schools reflect one of the eight designs below.

ATLAS Communities
The ATLAS design centers on pathways—groups of schools made up of high schools and the elementary and middle schools that feed into them. Teams of teachers from each pathway work together to design curriculum and assessments based on locally defined standards. The teachers in each pathway collaborate with parents and administrators to set and maintain sound management and academic policies, ultimately resulting in improved student performance.
For more information: (617) 969-7100;
e-mail: Atlas@edc.org; www.edc.org/FSC/ATLAS

Audrey Cohen College
The Audrey Cohen College system of education focuses student learning on the study and achievement of meaningful "purposes" for each semester's academic goals. Students achieve their purpose by using their knowledge and skills to plan, carry out, and evaluate a constructive action to benefit the community and the larger world. Leadership is emphasized and students are expected to meet high academic standards.
For more information: (212) 343-1234;
e-mail: JanithJ@aol.com; www.audrey-cohen.edu

Co-NECT Schools
Assisting schools in creating and managing their own high-tech equipment and network, Co-NECT uses technology to enhance every aspect of teaching, learning, professional development, and school management. Co-NECT schools are organized around small clusters of students who are taught by a cross-disciplinary team. Most students stay in the same cluster for at least two years. Teaching and learning revolve around interdisciplinary projects that promote critical skills and academic understanding, as well as integrating technology.
For more information: (617) 873-2683;
e-mail: info@conect.bbn.com; http://co-nect.bbn.com

Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound
Built on 10 design principles, Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (ELOB) operates on the belief that learning is an expedition into the unknown. ELOB draws on the power of purposeful, intellectual investigations—called learning expeditions—to improve student achievement and build character. Learning expeditions are long-term, academically rigorous, interdisciplinary studies that require students to work inside and outside the classroom. In ELOB schools, students and teachers stay together for more than one year, teachers work collaboratively, and tracking is eliminated.
For more information: (617) 576-1260;
e-mail: info@elob.ednet; http://hugse1.harvard.edu/~elob

Los Angeles Learning Centers
The Los Angeles Learning Centers (LALC) design is a comprehensive K–12 model for urban schools. The curriculum and instruction are designed to ensure that all students are taught in a K–12 community, enabling new strategies to overcome barriers by addressing the health and well-being of students and their families. Governance and management are also restructured to engage community members in decision making and to ensure that the design can improve and evolve. LALC also incorporates the extensive use of advanced technology as an essential element for implementation of the design.
For more information: (213) 622-5237;
e-mail: gpruitt@laedu.lalc.k12.ca.us; www.lalc.k12.ca.us

Modern Red Schoolhouse Institute
This design strives to help all students achieve high standards through the construction of a standards-driven curriculum; use of traditional and performance-based assessments; establishment of effective organizational patterns and professional-development programs; and implementation of effective community-involvement strategies. Students master a rigorous curriculum, develop character, and promote the principles of democratic government. These elements of the traditional red schoolhouse are combined with a high level of flexibility in organizing instruction and deploying resources; use of innovative teaching methodologies; student groupings for continuous progress; and advanced technology as a learning and instructional management tool.
For more information: (888) 275-6774;
e-mail: skilgore@mrsh.org; www.mrsh.org

National Alliance for Restructuring Education
This partnership of schools, districts, states, and leading national organizations works to change the education system from classroom to statehouse through a five-point set of priorities. Known as "design tasks," they are: standards and assessments, learning environments, high-performance management, community services and supports, and public engagement. The National Alliance seeks to enable all graduating high school students to attain the Certificate of Initial Mastery, a credential representing a high standard of academic accomplishment.
For more information: (202) 783-3668;
e-mail: nareinfo@ncee.org;
www.ncee.org/OurPrograms/narePage.html

Roots and Wings
This elementary school design builds on the widely used Success for All reading program and incorporates science, history, and mathematics to achieve a comprehensive academic program. The premise of the design is that schools must do whatever it takes to make sure all students succeed. To this end, Roots and Wings schools provide at-risk students with tutors, family support, and a variety of other services. While the "roots" of the design refer to mastery of basics, the "wings" represent advanced accomplishments that students achieve through interdisciplinary projects and a challenging curriculum provided by the design.
For more information: (410) 516-0274;
e-mail: rslavin@inet.ed.gov; http://scov.csos.jhu.edu/sfa

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New American Schools

Papers in this series include . . .

- Design-Based Assistance as a Cornerstone of a School Improvement Strategy
- How to Create and Manage a Decentralized Education System
- How to Rethink School Budgets to Support School Transformation
- How to Rebuild a Local Professional Development Infrastructure
- How to Make the Link Between Standards, Assessments, and Real Student Achievement
- How to Create Incentives for Design-Based Schools
- How to Engage Educators, Parents, and the Community in Design-Based School Change

Accompanying this series are New American Schools Action Tools

To help you implement the ideas and suggestions recommended in the Getting Better by Design "How-To" series, New American Schools is creating hands-on Action Tools that complement and expand the use of the research papers. As they become available, each tool will be posted on the NAS web site, www.naschools.org.

For more information about the Getting Better by Design series . . .

For more information about the Getting Better by Design "How-To" papers and the Action Tools that will correspond with this series, or to obtain copies of the Getting Better by Design "How-To" papers, write to New American Schools, 1000 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 2710, Arlington, VA 22209 or call (703) 908-9500. NAS can also be reached by electronic mail at info@nasdc.org or via the Internet at www.naschools.org.

Education Commission of the States

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